

GMPO Director's Report

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GMP Business and Industry Group Hosts Congressional Briefing in D.C.

The Gulf of Mexico Business Coalition sponsored a Congressional Briefing Feb. 11 to showcase the Gulf of Mexico Program. Three Congressional representatives volunteered to serve as sponsors of the event:

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (Rep. TX); Congressman Ruben Hinojosa (Dem. TX); and, Congresswoman

Katherine Harris (Rep. FL).



Michael Lyons, Gulf Coalition Chairman, opened the briefing with an overview of the Coalition's history and successful involvement in the development of the Program since 1995. On behalf of the Gulf Coalition, he gave the Program high praise for its inclusive, non-regulatory partnership approach to coastal environmental issues. He charged the congressional representatives with getting to know and support the Program and further challenged them to take direct measures to begin to systematically grow the Program's capacity to meet the challenges facing the Gulf region. He concluded by stating that the GMP was the best effort of its kind in government and that it deserved Congressional support.

Ben Grumbles, Acting Assistant Administrator for EPA, briefly addressed the group and emphasized a need to focus more on the Gulf region. Bryon Griffith, Director of the GMP, provided an overview of the aggregate values of several important coastal resources and supporting economies at risk in the Gulf and a sampling of the priority threats to their sustainability. Griffith also addressed the predictions of increasing coastal population.

Congressman Hinojosa expressed his support for the Program's efforts and used his home town of Brownsville, TX, as an example of coastal population growth. Brownsville's population has increased 48 percent since 1990 and is suffering environmentally as a result of that rapid growth.

Chris Schons, from Congresswoman Harris' office indicated that the Congresswoman is working to establish a Gulf States Caucus to help bring more focus to the Gulf in many areas including the environment. Schons said the Congresswoman supports the GMP and will begin to work to organize the caucus to take up the charge of getting appropriate funding levels for Gulf of Mexico issues. (*contact Bryon Griffith, 228-688-1172 or griffith.bryon@epa.gov*)

Florida State Technical Meeting

The NRCS held their State Technical Committee Meeting in Gainesville, FL., Jan. 21. The meeting representatives included the NRCS, Suwannee River Water Management District, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, Sun Partnership; EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation, Division of Forestry; Southwest Florida Water Management District, Farm Bureau, Florida Cattlemen's Association, The Nature Conservancy, Florida DEP and others.

The NRCS State Conservationist, presented the FY 2004 Projected Program Funding. Other items of interest were updates on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Farmland Protection Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives, the Grassland Reserves Program, and the Conservation Security Program. (*Contact Diane Altzman, 228-688-7015 or altzman.diane@epa.gov*)

Communications Committee Meets in Galveston

Members of the Gulf of Mexico Program Communications Committee met in Galveston, TX, Feb. 5-6 to develop a plan for elevating the "One Gulf...One Community!" communications campaign to a higher level.

The group began with a comprehensive review of the tools used in this campaign since 2000, including the video news releases, radio public service announcements, the One Gulf web site, and the Gulf Guardian Awards program. After much discussion, members agreed that efforts during the next two or three years needed to be directed toward the web site in areas of content, design, and marketing. All past communications efforts have directed the public to the web site. An ad hoc group was formed to begin work on this goal.

The group also discussed ways for the Communications Committee to inform key elected decision makers about the value of the Gulf of Mexico and the efforts of the Gulf of Mexico partnership to protect and restore it. (*contact Terry Hines Smith, 228-688-1159 or hines-smith.terry@epa.gov*)

Nutrient Pilot Study Workshop

The Gulf of Mexico Program Office, at the request of EPA headquarters and EPA Region 4, is coordinating the process of data collection to perform a meaningful characterization and ecosystem assessment of nutrient loads/responses for the near coastal waters of Lake Borgne to Mobile Bay. This characterization and assessment will be used to provide information to States for the development of nutrient criteria and standards. The first phase of this project is to identify nutrient data sources for the designated study area and to prepare a compendium and analyses of current and historical nutrient data. The compendium is entitled: *A Scientific Assessment of Nutrient Concentrations, Loads, and Biological Response in the Northern Gulf of Mexico*.

On Feb. 10 and 11 members of the Nutrient Pilot Study Workgroup met at Stennis Space Center to review the activities completed under Phase I and to outline suggested activities for Phase II. Within Phase I, the Quality Assurance Project Plan and compendium were completed and sent to the workgroup for review. At the meeting, the participants discussed the data inventory and assessment (location/coverage and month, season, year or continuous). Based upon the identified data and assessments, the workgroup responded with a variety of needs including additional nutrient load characterizations, seasonal/interannual variability and data gap analysis.

Phase II of this project will provide assistance to the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama by way of an analysis of the data compiled during Phase I. The efforts of this project will be to support data identification, recovery, and compilation activities (Phase I) and to provide further data descriptive analysis (data gap analysis) that will support the States' determination of reference conditions for impaired waters and other waterbodies of interest. (*contact Larinda Tervelt, 228-688-1033 or tervelt.larinda@epa.gov*)

Calendar Items

Date	Event	Location	Contact
July 13	Texas FY 06 State Projects Meeting	Austin, TX	Gloria Car 228-688-2421
July 15	Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting	New Orleans	Drew Puffer 228-688-3913
July 21-22	Florida FY 06 State Project Meeting	Tallahassee, FL	Gloria Car 228-688-2421
July 29	Mississippi FY 06 State Projects Meeting	Biloxi, MS	Gloria Car 228-688-2421
August 3	Louisiana FY 06 State Projects Meeting	Baton Rouge, LA	Gloria Car 228-688-2421
August 4-6	Alabama FY 06 State Projects Meeting will be held sometime this week	Mobile, AL	Gloria Car 228-688-2421
Sept. 1-2	Hypoxia Task Force Meeting	Minneapolis, MN	Larinda Tervelt 228-688-1033
Sept. 13-15	Coastal & Estuarine Habitat Restoration Conference	Seattle, WA	Diane Altzman 228-688-7015
Sept. 21-23	Southern States Environmental Conference & Exhibition	Biloxi, MS	Terry Hines Smith 228-688-1159
Sept. 22	Gulf Guardian Awards Ceremony	Biloxi, MS	Terry Hines Smith 228-688-1159